

'Love Jihad' and Conversion Laws

Muslim woman in red Indian cultural attire holding hand of significant other and pointing to Taj Mahal in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India

Defining 'love jihad'

The 'love jihad' conspiracy argues that Muslim men are waging Jihad in India by luring Hindu women into marriages through trickery, in order to convert them to Islam.³⁴⁶ Proponents of 'love jihad' claim that these young men are waging war the capture of innocent Hindu women's hearts, referred to as 'Love Romeos'. Right-wing nationalists in particular, construct 'love jihad' as a strategy employed by Muslim fundamentalists to boost population numbers in a supposed ongoing demographic war to outnumber Hindus in India.³⁴⁷ Hindutva groups and forces have consistently expressed a "fear" that Hindu women are being converted to Islam in the name of "false love".³⁴⁸ Associate Professor of History, Charu Gupta from Delhi University brings attention to the way in which these anxieties around the conversion of Hindu women can be traced to the 1920's.³⁴⁹ However in the more recent wake of terrorist threats and Muslim fundamentalism, increasing images of a violent and virulent Muslim have intensified anxieties of a more 'global' Islamist conspiracy. In particular, it has been professed that there is a foreign influence on these 'false love conversions', and that "Muslim youth are receiving funds from abroad to lure Hindu women in these marriages of trickery and false love".³⁵⁰ Proponents even profess that "Muslim youth are receiving funds from abroad for purchasing designer clothes, vehicles, mobile phones and expensive gifts to woo Hindu women and lure them away".³⁵¹ It was further "alleged that beautiful, well-dressed young Muslim men were posing as Hindus... with red pūjā (worship) threads on their wrists and with ambiguous nick-names, it was claimed they were hanging around girls' schools and colleges".³⁵² The 2010 Foreign (Contribution) Regulation Act thus attempts to regulate the inflow use of such alleged funding received from foreign individuals, associations, and companies that may be "detrimental to the national interest".³⁵³

The first public appearance of the term 'love jihad' can be traced to around 2009, mainly in the southern states of Kerala and Karnataka. It's formulation, while originating in the early twentieth century, combines contemporary anxieties around loss of identity and conversion with stereotypes linking Muslims with terrorism and extremism.³⁵⁴ Gupta summarizes that "'love jihad', which is actually a jihad against love, is a 'delicious' political fantasy, a lethal mobilisation strategy, a vicious crusade, and an emotive mythical campaign. It is an attempt by Hindutva forces for political and communal mobilisation in the name of women."³⁵⁵

346 Gupta, *Allegories of love Jihad*; Khalid, "The Hadiya Case".

347 Mohan, "Love Jihad and demographic fears."

348 Gupta "Allegories of love Jihad".

349 Ibid; Charu Gupta, "Hindu women, Muslim men: Love Jihad and conversions", *Economic and Political Weekly* (2009): 13-15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25663907>

350 Gupta, "Hindu women, Muslim men", 13.

351 Gupta, *Allegories of love Jihad*, 295.

352 Ibid, 295.

353 USCIRF. "2017 Annual Report".

354 CSSS, "A Narrowing Space".

355 Charu Gupta, "When Society Is Threatened by Love", *The Tribune*, 2014, 9, [http://www.academia.edu/10306613/When Society is threatened by love](http://www.academia.edu/10306613/When_Society_is_threatened_by_love).

Historical Context

Fears around the supposed religious warfare of 'love jihad' have circulated in various forms of propaganda and anxieties across India for over a century. According to Associate Professor Charu Gupta who has published widely about Hindu-Muslim marriages in India, Muslim rulers have been historically portrayed as decadent manipulators in the popular literature of the late nineteenth century.³⁵⁶ This longstanding history of anxieties about Muslim numbers out-growing the Hindu population, can be traced back to as early as 1909 when N. Mukherji wrote the book 'Hindus: A Dying Race'. This book proceeded to influence many tracts and publications by the Hindu Maha Sabha, the parent organization of the RSS.³⁵⁷ However, the earliest connection to 'love jihad' can be traced to similar abduction and conversion campaigns launched by Arya Samaj and other Hindu revivalist bodies in the 1920s in north India, that drew sharper lines between Hindus and Muslims. As Gupta highlights:

“...in certain ways “love jihad,” and the various issues it touched on, had an uncanny resemblance to the “abduction” and conversion campaigns launched by the Arya Samaj and other Hindu revivalist bodies in the 1920s in UP, at a time when there was a spate of Hindu-Muslim riots in the region. Similar idioms have been repeatedly conjured up in a variety of ways, for example in 2009, thus revealing the wider continuity of such fabricated metaphors.”³⁵⁸

It was such abductions that provided 'one of the glues for Hindu unity' in a country divided by caste. Such fears around 'love jihad' particularly increased following the 1947 Partition of India, whereby women on both sides of the conflict were impacted and 'recovered' from opposing religious groups.³⁵⁹ This tension and cultural pressure against interfaith marriage on either side has cultivated an social environment of hostility and fear that amplifies the recent efforts against 'love jihad'. With the emergence of Hindu nationalists as a dominant political force in India³⁶⁰, these allegations of 'love jihad' rose to national awareness in September 2009, initially alleged to have been conducted in Kerala and Mangalore in the coastal Karnataka region. Gupta highlights that:

“...the ogre of 'love jihad' became a public citation of Hindu communalists in BJP ruled Karnataka in August 2009 when the 18 year old Silija Raj ran away with the 24 year old Asgar Nazar from Chamarajnagar, a small Karnataka town around 180 km from Bangalore. In 2009, a division bench of the court ordered a CID investigation into the cases of 21,890 girls who went “missing” between 2005 and 2009. It was discovered that 229 girls had married men of other faiths, but that conversion had occurred only in 63 cases.”³⁶¹

356 Ishita Bhatia, “Right-Wing Men Assault Youth, Brothers in Court For ‘Love Jihad’.” *The Times of India*, January 15, 2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/right-wing-men-assault-youth-brothers-in-court-for-love-jihad/article-show/62498624.cms>; Gupta “Allegories of love Jihad”.

357 Mohan, “Love Jihad and demographic fears.”

358 Gupta “Allegories of love Jihad”, 293.

359 Ibid.

360 Bhatia, “Right-Wing Men Assault Youth”.

361 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 390.

Following this initial flare-up in 2009, concerns with 'love jihad' emerged again in 2010, 2011 and 2014, however most of these claims were deemed baseless with no evidence to support them. The unprecedented victory of the BJP in 2014, however, intensified Hindutva socio-religious cries against 'love jihad', and for *ghar vāpasī* (return to home).³⁶² For example, "Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh's sarkaryawah Suresh Bhayyaji Joshi stated in a press conference as late as October 20, 2014, that the 'Hindu samaj (society) has been facing the 'shame' of 'love jihad' since long, and the Uttar Pradesh government should take a 'serious view' of it, as it 'hurts the dignity of women'".³⁶³ Further, "The September 7, 2014, issues of RSS's mouthpieces, Panchjanya and Organiser, had their cover stories on 'love jihad'. They urged people to raise the slogan 'love ever, 'love jihad' never!' We have witnessed an aggressive campaign around 'love jihad' in various villages, mofussils and towns of western UP in the months of August and September, particularly prior to the recent elections, by Hindutva organisations like the Dharma Jagran Manch, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal".³⁶⁴

The current socio-political context is thus shaped by this history of fear around 'love jihad', creating a hostile and divisive environment. This environment has encouraged political and communal mobilization in the name of Hindu women via increasingly aggressive metaphors against interfaith marriage.³⁶⁵

'Love Jihad' and the Politics of Gender in India

The political landscaping of communalism has historically, and continues to draw on the figure of vulnerable Hindu women to carry on orchestrated campaigns against 'love jihad'.³⁶⁶ Indeed, through campaigns against alleged 'love jihad', "Hindu men have been asked to assert their prowess, protect their women and avenge such wrongs...[and]...move the centre of sexual violence from men in general and Hindu men in particular, towards the Muslim male".³⁶⁷ This section therefore provides an overview of how 'love jihad' is both shaped by, and continues to shape the Hindutva politics of gender in India.

First, the 'love jihad' myth exacerbates fears of 'breeding Muslims' overtaking Hindu population in India³⁶⁸ through what has been labelled as a 'population Jihad'.³⁶⁹ According to proponents of 'love jihad', these forced conversions of Hindu women in the name of love are part of an international conspiracy to increase Muslim population at the cost of a supposed decline in Hindu numbers through the potential loss of child-bearing Hindu wombs.³⁷⁰ For example, in 2016, high-ranking BJP parliamentarians, such as Yogi Adityanath and Sakshi Maharaj, reportedly called for laws to control the Muslim population.³⁷¹

In addition, Hindu patriarchal notions appear deeply entrenched in discourse campaigns against 'love jihad', which reinforce images of passive victimized Hindu women at the hands of inscrutable Muslims abound.³⁷² This is accompanied by stereotypes of the hyper-sexualized, evil, licentious, and sexually

362 Ibid.

363 Gupta, "When Society Is Threatened by Love", 9.

364 Ibid, 9.

365 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad".

366 Gupta, "When Society Is Threatened by Love.

367 Ibid, 9.

368 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad".

369 Muhammed Mashkoor, "The Number Question: Muslim Demography and Islamophobia in India", *Islam And Muslim Societies: A Social Science Journal* 11, 11 (2018) 32-39.

370 Gupta, "Hindu women, Muslim men".

371 USCIRE "2017 Annual Report".

372 Gupta, "When Society Is Threatened by Love".

violent Muslim male that must be punished by the hyper-masculine Hindu male:

“The ‘love jihad’ campaign, while focusing its anger on Muslims, received its emotional bonding from the “victimized” Hindu woman. The Hindu woman has often been regarded as an exclusive preserve of the Hindu man, and safeguarding her virtue is identified as his exclusive prerogative. In the name of protecting “our” women, which the women themselves have never asked for, they justify all forms of violence”.³⁷³

Such allegations of Muslim youth trapping Hindu women ‘through love’ to convert to Islam has been a potent propaganda tool by right-wing Hindu nationalists, to exacerbate anti-Muslim sentiment. Indeed, “as part of the motif of ‘love jihad’, Hindus were constantly asked to be brave, to avenge past wrongs, and to be the warriors of a strong Hindu race”.³⁷⁴

Hindu nationalists have actively responded to the perceived problem of Hindu women marrying outside their community with a campaign of *bahu lao, beti bachao* (‘bring in the daughter-in-law, save the daughter’) – an initiative to ‘protect’ Hindu men married to Muslims or Christians and to encourage women from those communities to marry into Hinduism.³⁷⁵ Launched in 2015 in Uttar Pradesh by Bajrang Dal (a wing of the VHP and part of the broader Sangh Parivar), this campaign effectively emulates the alleged ‘love jihad’ and has also reached other states such as West Bengal, where in recent years the BJP has increased their influence. In July 2015, an RSS activist reportedly distributed pamphlets at schools warning pupils that Hindu women had to be protected from Muslim men who were tricking them into marriage and then selling them at Arab markets.³⁷⁶

The body of the Hindu woman in such campaigns and warnings, become a site for both claims to community homogeneity and honor, as well as for cracks within its articulation³⁷⁷, whereby “tales of abducted and converted Hindu women were metamorphosed into a symbol of both sacredness and humiliation. Simultaneously, images of passive victimized Hindu women, duped at the hand of inscrutable Muslims were used in an attempt to silence and erase female subjectivity and desire”.³⁷⁸ Indeed, the converted Hindu woman is a potential site of outrage of family order and religious sentiment, strengthening the drive for Hindu nationalist mobilization. Allegations of abductions have caused a number of localized affrays, and even occasional riots, tracing back to Kanpur in June 1924 and in Mathura in March 1928, where it was reported that a Muslim man had eloped with a Hindu woman.³⁷⁹ This communalized, gendered anxiety around the ‘abduction’ of Hindu women was also evident in epidemics of rumors before the Gujarat carnage in 2002.³⁸⁰ Whether in 1920, or 2018, any possibility of women exercising their legitimate right to love and their right to personal choice is ignored within these

373 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 298.

374 Ibid, 294.

375 Gourav Mishra, “Love Jihad Incidents In 2017 Which Went Beyond Religion to Alleged Terrorist Links”, *International Business Times India Edition*, December 30, 2017, <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/love-jihad-incidents-2017-which-went-beyond-religion-alleged-terrorist-links-754996>

376 Ibid.

377 Gupta, “When Society Is Threatened by Love”.

378 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 297.

379 Gupta, “When Society Is Threatened by Love”.

380 Mohan, “Love Jihad and demographic fears.”

campaigns that demonize inter-religious love and intimacies and undermine female free choice.³⁸¹ Fitting neatly into this gendered anxiety was the communalization of the issue of the 'abduction' of Hindu women, particularly based on the premise that female conversion is subject to family and communal approval, without individual autonomy. This ultimately "undermines the status of women in India with the old patriarchal notion that women are not self-sufficient to make their own decisions".³⁸² Thus, the embedding of patriarchy, 'nationhood' and violence against women in discourses on population numbers has continued to make reproductive women's bodies a site of communal anxiety about the future of Muslim versus Hindu population numbers³⁸³, manifesting in fears around 'love jihad' and the way in which it regulates and controls the everyday lives of Hindu women.³⁸⁴

Anti-Conversion Laws and Ghar Vāpasī

Alongside 'love jihad', the other issue that gained momentum at the end of 2014 was that of *ghar vāpasī*. "*Ghar vāpasī* signaled a synchronized vocabulary of anti-conversion by the BJP and of reconversion by the VHP and Dharm Jagran Samiti, an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh" (Gupta, 2018, p. 291).

"Ghar vāpasī has been touted as the return to authentic origins, the starting point, the abode of birth. It produces and enforces notions of a primordial religious identity, whereby all and everyone are declared Hindus. Thus states Praveen Togadia of the VHP: "At one point of time, the entire world was Hindu. There were seven billion Hindus, and now there are just one billion." The shift from the whole world to the Hindu nation is swift, as ghar vāpasī denationalizes Islam and Christianity, facilitating their "othering".³⁸⁵

Further, a "common thread that links both 'love jihad' and ghar vāpasī is the obsession with the numerical strength of Hindus. The numbers game, and constructed fears around it, has been central to the modern politics of Hindutva...religious conversions have been regarded as not only challenging an established community's assent to religious doctrines and practices, but also altering demographic equations and producing numerical imbalances".³⁸⁶ Religious conversions and re-conversions, two sides of the same coin, have thus acquired political prominence in more contentious ways at the end of 2014.³⁸⁷ This can be connected directly to discourses around 'love jihad', whereby Hindu nationalists have responded to the perceived problem of Hindu women marrying outside their community by introducing, and in some states, implementing anti-conversion Laws, named "Freedom of Religion" Acts. The Hindu Right have introduced anti-conversion laws in an attempt to control 'forced conversions', and claim to have no objection to 'voluntary' conversions. Despite this claim that the laws only target 'forced conversions', an increased number of Indian states have written laws that make it virtually impossible

381 Ibid.

382 Sahel Md Delabul Hossain, Seema Kumari Ladsaria, Rajni Singh, "'Love-Jihad': Protection of Religious Proximity an Indian Situation", *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 2, 4 (2016), 672 <https://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/article/view/211>

383 Mohan, "Love Jihad and demographic fears."

384 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad".

385 Ibid, 302.

386 Ibid, 302.

387 Ibid.

for Hindus to convert to other religions, particularly Abrahamic faiths. These laws have been passed by six legislatures in Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Odisha. These laws generally require government officials to assess the legality of conversions and disbar conversions by use of “force,” which is defined as a show of force or threat of injury or threat of divine displeasure or social ex-communication. Infringement of these laws results in fines and imprisonment for anyone who uses force, fraud, or “inducement” to convert another.³⁸⁸ Alternatively, inter-religious couples who wish to marry without conversion, must apply one-month in advance under the ‘Special Marriage Act’ where the legality of their marriage is assessed, and often dismissed. Many eloping couples are afraid to apply for legal marriage under this act, and thus take conversion as the way out of utilizing this legislation.³⁸⁹

Anti-conversion laws thus disproportionately target Abrahamic faiths, as conversion to any religion that has the concept of hell or heaven is implicitly assumed to be a forcible conversion.³⁹⁰ Further, “inducement” or “allurement” that disqualify conversions are defined to include “the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise.” These specifically target Christian missionaries whose schools, hospitals and other charitable works provide free services to all, including non-Christians.³⁹¹ Although the anti-conversion laws do not explicitly ban conversions, in practice these laws both by their design and implementation, infringe upon the individual’s right to convert, favor Hinduism over minority religions, and represent a significant challenge to Indian secularism.³⁹² Most laws require that government be notified of the conversions 30 days in advance. If the government official determines that the conversion was forced then the guilt is liable to a punishment of up to three years’ imprisonment, which is seven years in the case of tribals. Despite thousands of Christians and Muslims being converted to Hinduism, not one case of forced conversion is known to have been applied to conversions into Hinduism.³⁹³ As Gupta highlights: “when a Hindu man marries a Muslim woman, it is always portrayed as “romance” and “love” by Hindu organizations, while when the reverse happens it is depicted as “coercion”.³⁹⁴ An explicit example of this double-standard is reflected in the 2008 ethnic cleansing of a Christian population from Kandhamal in Odisha in 2008 by Hindu ultra-nationalist militias, who were only allowed to return on the condition that they renounce Christianity.³⁹⁵ Despite this example, there remain no cases of forced conversion applied on the Hindu groups or individuals. These laws are therefore critiqued as being one-sided, only concerned with conversions away from Hinduism but not toward Hinduism.³⁹⁶ Sample cases relating to conversion are provided in the table below, including preventing conversion to Islam, threats against other religious groups, such as Christians to convert to Hinduism, and attacks against a Church on the basis of alleged forced conversions to Christianity.

388 USCIRF, “2017 Annual Report”.

389 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”.

390 Alliance for Justice & Accountability, “Minority Rights Violations in India”.

391 Ibid.

392 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”.

393 Gulam Jeelani, “From Love Jihad, Conversion To SRK: 10 Controversial Comments by UP’S New CM Yogi Adityanath”, *Hindustan Times*, April 6, 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/assembly-elections/from-love-jihad-conversion-to-srk-10-controversial-comments-by-up-s-new-cm-yogi-adityanath/story-5JW2ZFGZzAdIZeIcjcZCNM.html>.

394 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 289.

395 Menon, “‘Security’, Home, And Belonging in Contemporary India”.

396 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”; CSSS, “A Narrowing Space”.

Table No. 1: Sample Cases relating to Conversion in India

#	Date	Place	Event
1	September 2014	Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh	Members of the Bajrang Dal and VHP put pressure on district officials to reject nine Hindu Dalits' petitions to convert to Islam. ³⁹⁷
2	December 2014	Madhunagar, Uttar Pradesh	RSS-related groups, the Dharma Jagran Samanvay Vibhag and Bajrang Dal, converted 200 Muslim persons to Hinduism. The new converts later stated they had been misled, told that they were receiving help to get ID cards. ³⁹⁸
3	February 2016	Across India	The RSS allegedly put up threatening signs across India in train stations stating Christians need to convert to Hinduism or leave the country by 2021, or risk death. ³⁹⁹
4	April 2017	Maharajganj, Uttar Pradesh	Members of the group Hindu Yuva Vahini called police to a Christian church by alleging forced conversions, causing disruption to a prayer service involving Ukrainian and U.S. tourists. While Hindu Yuva Vahini members surrounded the church during the disruption, the police visit found no evidence of forced conversions. ⁴⁰⁰

Table Source: Dr. Angana P. Chatterji and cited material

Hindu nationalist groups have been able to operate such assertive *Ghar Vāpasī* campaigns targeting minorities for conversion with apparent impunity. These so-called 'homecomings' are justified by the RSS as 'reconversions' on the basis that their predecessors were themselves supposedly converted from Hinduism through proselytization or force by other 'foreign' religions, including Islam.⁴⁰¹ Observers note that these laws create a hostile and, on occasion, violent environments for religious minority communities because they do not require any evidence to support accusations of wrongdoing.⁴⁰² Despite the shortcomings of these laws, BJP President Amit Shah has advocated for a nationwide anti-conversion law.⁴⁰³ In spite of the absence of credible data to support laws restricting religious conversions in India, there are voices within the government which have called for a national anti-conversion law.⁴⁰⁴ In April 2015, for example, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh of the BJP called for a national level anti-conversion law, ostensibly to protect communal harmony, though critics

397 United States Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2014 – India", Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238494>.

398 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "2015 Annual Report", Washington DC: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2015, 151 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/India%202015.pdf>.

399 USCIRF. "2017 Annual Report", 152.

400 Suhasini Raj, and Nida Najar, "Hindu Group Claims Christians Tried Forced Conversions in India", *New York Times*, April 8, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/08/world/asia/india-uttar-pradesh-hindu-christian-church-conversions.html>.

401 CSSS, "A Narrowing Space".

402 USCIRF. "2018 Annual Report".

403 USCIRF. "2017 Annual Report".

404 CSSS, "A Narrowing Space".

have pointed out that this would violate basic religious freedoms.⁴⁰⁵

On the flipside, *Ghar Vāpasī* or Conversion to Hinduism ceremonies are initiated on the view that all individuals born in India are Hindus by default, even if their communities have practiced other faiths for several generations.

“**Ghar vāpasī has been touted as the return to authentic origins, the starting point, the abode of birth. It produces and enforces notions of a primordial religious identity, whereby all and everyone are declared Hindus. Thus states Praveen Togadia of the VHP: “At one point of time, the entire world was Hindu. There were seven billion Hindus, and now there are just one billion.” The shift from the whole world to the Hindu nation is swift, as ghar vāpasī denationalizes Islam and Christianity, facilitating their “othering.”**”⁴⁰⁶

There have been ongoing reports of *Ghar Vāpasī* ceremonies in 2017, although their number and nature were impossible to confirm.⁴⁰⁷ In 2014, following the BJP national victory, the RSS announced plans to “reconvert” thousands of Christian and Muslims families to Hinduism as part of a so-called *Ghar Vāpasī* (returning home) program, and began raising money to do so. The Dharm Jagran Samiti (Religious Awakening Council) is an RSS-VHP affiliate dedicated to converting Muslims and Christians to Hinduism. According to a report by *India Today*, this organization said it would expedite its *Ghar Vāpasī* campaign: “Muslims and Christians don’t have any right to stay here [in India],” one of its leaders said in December 2014. “Our target is to make India a Hindu nation by 2021... Muslims and Christians must convert to Hinduism “if they want to stay in this country”.⁴⁰⁸ This statement is connected to the organizations’ claims that they converted 57 Muslim families to Hinduism in Uttar Pradesh. Such conversion ceremonies have led to panic among Muslims and the displacement of Muslim communities from their homes. However, after domestic and international outcry, the RSS postponed its plans. Nevertheless, in its annual report presented of 2015, the VHP claimed to have converted nearly 34,000 people to Hinduism over a year and “prevented” nearly 49,000 Hindus from converting to other religions. These conversions and “preventions” were carried out in the states of Odisha, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Assam. The Dharm Jagran Samiti also distributed pamphlets for its fundraising drive where the cost of converting a Muslim was fixed at Rs. 500,000 (\$7,500) and of converting a Christian at Rs. 200,000 (\$3,000). BJP MP Satish Gautam welcomed the announcement.⁴⁰⁹ Smaller-scale forced conversions of religious minorities were also reported in 2016. In addition, in February 2016 the RSS reportedly placed signs in train stations throughout India that said Christians had to leave India or convert to Hinduism or they will be killed by 2021.⁴¹⁰

As Gupta highlights, the language of *Ghar Vāpasī* is not motivated by a desire to promote spirituality and religious values but is imbued with a strong anti-Christian and anti-Muslim conviction and passion, adopting language that frames all other religions as anti-national, and in a domain of exile. Further,

405 Ibid.

406 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 302.

407 USCIRF. “2018 Annual Report”.

408 Piyush Srivastava, “Dharm Jagran Samiti Leader Vows to Create Hindu Rashtra by 2021”, *India Today*, December 19, 2014. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/dharm-jagran-samiti-leader-vows-to-create-hindu-rashtra-by-2021-231854-2014-12-19>.

409 Alliance for Justice & Accountability, “Minority Rights Violations in India”.

410 USCIRF. “2017 Annual Report”.

it adopts a language that views all non-Hindu religions as anti-national, and thus exacerbates the othering of non-Hindu religious groups, such as Muslim in India. Simultaneously, anti-conversion and reconversion campaigns, along with 'love jihad', fortify Hindutva politics around religious identities and boundaries, and impose a creed of Hindu masculinity and violence, particularly against women.⁴¹¹

'Love Jihad' propaganda and Implications

This propaganda and fear around 'love jihad', has been falsified in multiple contexts and periods over the last decade, as mere conspiracy and myth. Indeed, as Gupta also brings to our attention: "in actual practice, 'love jihad' was an emotive mythical campaign, a "delicious" political fantasy, a lethal mobilization strategy and a vicious crusade – a jihad against love – for political gains in elections".⁴¹² This myth has been propagated through pamphlets, meetings, debates, rumors and everyday conversations, sustaining 'love jihad' as an active cultural, and ultimately political issue that monopolized the everyday representation of inter-religious marriages. Such propaganda around 'love jihad' were falsified through numerous investigations, including in 2009 and 2012.



In 2009 "...the then CID DGP, D. V. Guruprasad, told the High Court: "There is no organised attempt by any group of individuals to entice girls/women belonging to Hindu or Christian religions to marry Muslim boys with the aim of converting them to Islam." Not only did the Karnataka High Court finally close the investigations into 'love jihad' in November 2013, finding no evidence of any such conspiracy, but it ruled that Silija Raj was free to go anywhere she wished. She chose to go with her husband. In 2012, the Kerala police categorically declared that 'love jihad' was a "campaign with no substance," and instead brought legal proceedings against the website hindujagruti.org for spreading religious hatred and false propaganda"⁴¹³



Most recently, the NDTV investigative report on 'love jihad' found that police investigations failed to find evidence of an organized 'love jihad' campaign. The Police report stated that sporadic cases of trickery by unscrupulous men were not evidence of a broader conspiracy. In Uttar Pradesh, police also found no evidence of attempted or forced conversion in five of six reported 'love jihad' cases. "In most cases we found that a Hindu girl and Muslim boy were in love and had married against their parents' will," said state police Chief A.L. Banerjee. "These are cases of love marriages and not 'love jihad'."⁴¹⁴ The Alliance for Justice & Accountability draws on the expose by Cobrapost and Gulail (both investigative portals) to verify that the 'love jihad' campaign is a fabrication used by Hindutva leaders to create false propaganda that girls are in danger and need to be rescued from Muslim boys.⁴¹⁵ Most recently, the 'Kerala Love-Jihad' investigation ordered by the Supreme Court and undertaken by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2017 found that of the eighty-nine speculated cases, only eleven cases of 'love jihad' were confirmed by Kerala Police Chief Loknath Behera. Further, four of these eleven cases of 'love jihad', involved Hindu men converting to Islam to marry Muslim Women, which was objected

411 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad".

412 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad", 292.

413 Ibid, 300.

414 Alliance for Justice & Accountability, "Minority Rights Violations in India".

415 Ibid.

by the couple's families.⁴¹⁶ Further, the NIA informed the Supreme Court that "none of the man and women it examined in cases that emerged while investigating the Kerala 'love jihad' case were enticed by monetary benefits to convert to Islam".⁴¹⁷

Despite proof of the 'love jihad' myth, Hindu nationalist groups, in particular the RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), have launched counter-campaigns and initiatives that spread fear and hostility around inter-religious marriages. Gupta draws particular attention to the spike in anti-'love jihad' propaganda by Hindu publicists in the 2014 national elections:

“the year 2014 thus saw orchestrated propaganda campaigns and popular inflammatory and demagogic appeals led by a section of Hindu publicists against 'love jihad' against the supposed 'abductions' and conversions of Hindu women by Muslim men, ranging from allegations of rape and forced marriages, to elopement, love, luring and conversion... drawing on diverse sources such as small meetings, handbills, posters, myths, rumors and gossip, the campaign against the mythical 'love jihad' operated in a public-political domain and attempted to monopolize the field of everyday representation”.⁴¹⁸

Such propaganda has sparked Hindu vigilantes to not only police community members and relationships but are also demand legislation to restrict inter-religious marriages all together. The Bajrang Dal, for example, intend on prohibiting any Hindu woman who marries a Muslim man, from converting to Islam, despite running their own campaigns that encourage Hindu men to marry Muslim women. The Hindu Yuva Vahini have also allegedly carried out a “reverse 'love jihad'” in an Uttar Pradesh region, with the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath warning that if “one Hindu girl is converted [to Islam] we will convert 100 Muslim girls [to Hinduism]”.⁴¹⁹

Tracing back to 2009 when the concept of 'love jihad' gained momentum, organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Sri Ram Sene, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and Hindu Janjagruthi Samiti began to hold meetings, distribute pamphlets and even file court cases in Kerala, Karnataka and Delhi, declaring that the organisation, as part of an Islamist conspiracy, had devised plans for compulsive and deceitful religious conversions by winning over young women.⁴²⁰ In the years to follow, media and various sections of the Hindu fundamentalist groups such as the Bajrang Dal, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Akhil Bharati Vidyarthi Parishad mounted a sustained campaign, including the student wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University which distributed pamphlets, against this grand conspiracy.⁴²¹

The year of 2014 however saw orchestrated propaganda campaigns and popular inflammatory and demagogic appeals led by a section of Hindu publicists against 'love jihad' against the supposed

416 Younus, “Kerala: NIA finds only 11 out of 89 'love-jihad' cases to be true”, *The Siasat Daily*, 9 March, 2018, <https://www.siasat.com/news/kerala-nia-finds-only-11-out-89-love-jihad-cases-be-true-1327711/>.

417 Vijaita Singh, “No conversion money seen in 'love jihad' cases: NIA”. *The Hindu*. November 2, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/no-conversion-for-money-seen-in-love-jihad-cases-nia/article19966254.ece>

418 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 294.

419 Alliance for Justice & Accountability, “Minority Rights Violations in India”.

420 Gupta, “Hindu women, Muslim men”.

421 Mohan, “Love Jihad and demographic fears.”

'abductions' and conversions of Hindu women by Muslim men, ranging from allegations of rape and forced marriages, to elopement, love, luring and conversion.⁴²² Such attempts were particularly evident in Uttar Pradesh and to an extent in Bihar as well as other regions, where 'love jihad' was framed as important determinant of Hindu identity and consciousness in 2014, providing Hindu publicists with a common reference point. An example of this publicity is highlighted below:

“The 7 September 2014 issues of RSS’s mouthpieces, *Pāñcājanya* and *Organiser*, had ‘love jihad’ as their cover stories. They urged people to raise the slogan “love for ever, ‘love jihad’ never!” *Pāñcājanya*’s cover had an illustration of a man wearing a kaffiyeh or traditional Arab headdress, a beard in the shape of a heart, and sinister sunglasses in which red hearts were reflected. The magazine asked on the cover, “*pyār andhā yā dhandhā*” (love blind or trade)”.⁴²³

Indeed, “the idioms, language and symbols invoked during the ‘love jihad’ campaign were not only meant to draw sharper lines between Hindus and Muslims, but were also thought to be useful in reaping a rich political harvest in the election landscape of 2014”.⁴²⁴ These campaigns have intensified in more recent years, whereby Hindu nationalist groups have conducted ‘rescue operations’ to counter ‘love jihad’, and reportedly deployed right-wing lawyers to identify and disclose registered cases of inter-religious marriage between Muslim men and Hindu women.⁴²⁵ Such groups have also acknowledged levelling false accusations of rape and kidnapping against Muslim men, and have benefitted from legal and political patronage, with strong links to the police and certain political actors.⁴²⁶

A year-long investigation called *Operation Juliet* by Cobrapost and Gulail, published a report on the mythical nature of ‘love jihad’, and exposes the more extreme expressions of violence and control used by Hindutva groups in their bid to stop inter-religious marriage between Muslim men and Hindu women.⁴²⁷ According to the report, Hindutva outfits (Sangh Parivar) and its splinter groups use violence, intimidation, emotional blackmail, duplicity and drugs to split the married couples. The report reveals the systematic effort across pan-India to spread propaganda and campaigns that further cause a rift between two religious communities with the objective of feeding the national and identity anxieties to win elections.⁴²⁸ A primary example of this is reflected in the formation of ‘anti-Romeo squads’ by the police in Uttar Pradesh after winning the 2017 state elections in which the BJP campaign had consistently drawn on references to ‘love jihad’.⁴²⁹ In July, even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi finally condemned violent mob attacks, an affiliate organization of the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), announced plans to recruit 5,000 “religious soldiers” to “control cow smuggling and ‘love jihad’”.⁴³⁰ Further, in early 2018, the *Times of India* reported that Hindu nationalist groups utilize people to spy on interfaith couples in order to target the couples with ‘love jihad’ tactics of assault, threats, and

422 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”.

423 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 293.

424 Ibid, 293.

425 CSSS, “A Narrowing Space”, 21.

426 Guarav V. Bhatnagar, “BJP, RSS Leaders Caught Using ‘Love Jihad’ Bogey to Fuel Communal Polarisation”, *The Wire*, October 5, 2015. <https://thewire.in/communalism/bjp-rss-leaders-caught-using-love-jihad-bogey-to-fuel-communal-polarisation>

427 Cobrapost, “Operation Juliet: Busting the Bogey of ‘Love Jihad’”, *Cobrapost*, 4 October, 2015, <https://www.cobrapost.com/blog/operation-juliet-busting-the-bogey-of-love-jihad-2/900>

428 Ibid.

429 CSSS, “A Narrowing Space”, 8.

430 Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2018”.

possible arrests.

The ramifications of such campaigns and initiatives are wide-reaching, in not only fostering hate, further suppressing women to control and limiting their agency,⁴³¹ but more seriously contributing to riots such as the 2013 riots in Muzaffarnagar, as well as provoking smaller-scale communal tensions and violence in India, such as extremists blocking an interfaith marriage between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman who had converted to Islam.⁴³² The in-depth piece on love-Jihad and communal riots in Uttar Pradesh by the Hindustan Times highlights that “Inter-religious couples, however, say they are being hunted. Of the more than 12,000 low-key communal incidents recorded in UP since 2010, nearly 15 percent are spurred by cases involving women: from alleged sexual violence to elopement”.⁴³³ Indeed the negative impacts of propaganda against ‘love jihad’ on the current socio-political environment in India highlights the way in which “representation, performance, and events fed into each other, providing one of the primary sources of communal power”⁴³⁴ to Hindutva forces and communities across the nation.

‘Love Jihad’ in 2017

Cases and issues relating to ‘love jihad’ in the year of 2017 represented a peak in political discourse, propaganda and campaigns. As a means of further fuelling public anxieties around ‘love jihad’, the BJP formed ‘anti-Romeo squads’ in Uttar Pradesh after winning the 2017 state elections. Symbolic of a new level of securitization of this issue, these squads signified the formalization of initiatives and campaigns against the alleged activity of ‘love jihad’. This was accompanied by an affiliate organization of the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), announcing plans to recruit 5,000 “religious soldiers” to “control cow smuggling and ‘love jihad’”.⁴³⁵ In the same year, the *Times of India* reported that Hindu nationalist groups utilize people who spy on interfaith couples in order to target the couples with ‘love jihad’ tactics of assault, threats, and possible arrests. As reflected in Table 2, ‘love jihad’ in 2017 was emboldened by this formalization of counter-initiatives and campaigns, implemented through vigilante attacks against interfaith marriages or neighborhoods suspected of being home to such couples, and the death of an elderly man who was accused of facilitating ‘love jihad’. In addition, there was an increased distribution of official propaganda against ‘love jihad’. For example educational pamphlets, directed towards warning young Hindus against ‘love jihad’ were distributed at a spiritual fair in the state capital of Jaipur. Similarly, in early 2018, Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini, the women’s wing of the VHP, organized an awareness program for parents of young women across many regions of coastal Karnataka on ‘love jihad’. This included visiting households, schools, colleges and distributing handbills across Mangaluru city and other parts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Kasargod. In addition to propaganda and education against ‘love jihad’, 2017 to early 2018 was occupied by intensified public discourse and discussions on various mediums. Namely, In January, a Facebook posting ‘exposed’ a list of 100 interfaith couples where readers were encouraged to take violent action against them in accusation that the couples were formed as a result of “‘love jihad’”.⁴³⁶ This posting which included profiles and personal contact information, made couples and family members vulnerable to social pressure, and in some cases, receiving death threats.⁴³⁷

431 Gupta, “Hindu women, Muslim men”.

432 CSSS, “A Narrowing Space”, 21.

433 Appu E. Suresh. “Love Jihad: UP’s forbidden couples”, *Hindustan Times*. October 19 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/static/uttar-pradesh-communal-riot/love-jihad-uttar-pradesh/>

434 Gupta, “Allegories of love Jihad”, 295.

435 Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2018”.

436 Kim Arora, “Facebook post lists interfaith couples, calls for attacks”, *The Times of India*, February 6, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/facebook-post-lists-inter-faith-couples-calls-for-attacks/articleshow/62796340.cms>.

437 Ibid.



Agra, India. Taj Mahal Indian palace. Islamic architecture. Muslim couple entering through door to the mosque.

Table 2: Cases and Events relating to 'love jihad' in 2017

#	Date	Place	Event
1	March 2017	Rajasthan	RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal leaders called a massive gathering of Hindus from several villages in Rajasthan which decided to boycott Muslims in the villages because a Hindu woman had eloped with a Muslim man a night before she was to be married off to a Hindu. The police traced the runaway couple in New Delhi and then took the man in custody. ⁴³⁸
2	March 2017	Uttar Pradesh	The BJP campaign drew on references to 'love jihad' during the 2017 state elections in Uttar Pradesh and, in March 2017, following their electoral success, so-called 'anti-Romeo squads' were formed by the police. ⁴³⁹
3	April 2017	Meerut, Uttar Pradesh	Members of the Hindu Yuva Vahini forcibly entered a house in Meerut to accost a Muslim man and a Hindu woman belonging to another faith. The couple were forcibly taken to a police station, where the man was booked on charges of obscenity. The vigilantes were not reprimanded by the government. ⁴⁴⁰
4	May 2017	Nandrauli, Uttar Pradesh	Following news that a married Hindu woman and Muslim man had eloped, there were attacks on the homes of Muslims living in Nandrauli, an area in Sambhal District of Uttar Pradesh. This led to an exodus of the majority of Muslims from the village to nearby area. ⁴⁴¹
5	May 2017	Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh	Members of the VHP-affiliated Hindu Yuva Vahini beat to death Gulam Ahmad (60 years old) in an Orchard in village Sohi, accusing him of aiding another Muslim man to elope with a Hindu woman on May 2. The killers also harassed, molested, and threatened Ahmad's family members, leading to their exodus from the village. The local community was unsympathetic and subjected the family to a social boycott, which displaced them to Aligarh. ⁴⁴²
6	May 2017	Kerala	The Kerala High Court annulled the marriage of Hadiya, a 24-year-old woman who had converted to Islam from Hinduism, with Shafin Jahan, labelling her "weak and vulnerable... capable of being exploited". ⁴⁴³ Meanwhile, India's National Investigation Agency alleged the relationship to be a 'love jihad' and Jahan to have terrorist connections. ⁴⁴⁴ The NIA's accusations have not been substantiated and the Supreme Court overturned the annulment in 2018, allowing the couple to be together. ⁴⁴⁵

438 Salik Ahmad, "Love Jihad: Muslims of Rajasthan Village Boycotted after Man Elopess with Hindu Woman", *Hindustan Times*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/jaipur/love-jihad-muslims-of-rajasthan-village-boycotted-after-man-elopes-with-hindu-woman/story-MOsm6qcSc692GXfZPBbpI.html>

439 Sidharth Pandey, "UP Elections 2017: BJP Promised Anti-Romeo Squads to Stop Love Jihad, says its Meerut Leader", *NDTV*, February 05, 2017, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/up-elections-2017-bjp-promised-anti-romeo-squads-to-stop-love-jihad-says-its-meerut-leader-1656250>

440 Indian Express, "Hindu Yuva Vahini Harasses Interfaith Couple in Meerut." *Indian Express*, April 12, 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/hindu-yuva-vahini-harassed-a-interfaith-couple-in-meerut-4610464/>

441 Mohamad Ali, "Exodus of Nandrauli's Muslims Continues", *The Hindu*, May 20, 2017 <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/exodus-of-nandraulis-muslims-continues/article18516533.ece>.

442 Saurabh Sharma, "A Year After Lynching of Man in Bulandshahr over 'Love Jihad' Issue, Victim's Family Members Live Like Refugees", *Firstpost*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/a-year-after-lynching-of-man-in-bulandshahr-over-love-jihad-is-sue-victims-family-members-live-like-refugees-4501227.html>; The Wire Staff, "Hindutva's 'Love Jihad' Obsession Leads to Murder of Muslim Man in UP", *The Wire*, May 3, 2017, <https://thewire.in/politics/hindutvas-love-jihad-obsession-leads-to-murder-of-muslim-man-in-up>

443 Indian Express, "For the Record: 'It Is Absolutely Unsafe to Let (24-Year-Old) Be Free To Do As She Likes,'" *Indian Express*, May 31, 2017. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/for-the-record-it-is-absolutely-unsafe-to-let-24-year-old-be-free-to-do-as-she-likes-4681708/>.

444 Kavita Krishnan, "SC Should Defend Women's Privacy, Autonomy, Not Perpetuate 'Love Jihad' Myth," *The Wire*, August 20, 2017. <https://thewire.in/communalism/love-jihad-nia-probe-kerala-court>.

445 BBC, "India Supreme Court restores 'love jihad' marriage", *BBC*, March 08, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43327380>

7	Nov 2017	Jaipur	The Rajasthan government has asked schools in the state capital Jaipur to take students and teachers to a spiritual fair, where they can learn about 'love jihad'. This five-day fair intended for the social transformation of students' patriotism distributed pamphlets on 'love jihad'. The pamphlet talks about how prominent actors like Saif Ali Khan and Aamir Khan have been ensnaring Hindu women. It states that it's better to die in one's own religion than converting. Finally, it listed the places where 'love jihad' happens, including beauty parlors, mobile recharge shops, ladies' tailors, Muslim hawkers, and few others. ⁴⁴⁶
8	Nov 2017	Mumbai	Bandra police registered a First Information Report (FIR) against the husband of former model Rashmi Shahbazker after she filed a complaint that he had been forcing her to convert to Islam for the past 12 years. The police indicated that Ms. Shahbazker claimed her husband Asif Shahbazker was on a 'love jihad' mission. ⁴⁴⁷
9	Nov 2017	Kerala	A petition was filed in the Kerala High Court (HC), by 25-year-old Akshara Bose, alleging that she was subjected to forced conversion, sexual exploitation and fraudulent marriage. She also claimed that the woman's husband tried to sell her to Islamic State (ISIS). ⁴⁴⁸
10	Dec 2017	Online / Rajasthan	A Hindu named Shambhulal Regar used 'love jihad' as an obfuscating cover for his murder of a Muslim for his own personal reasons. Regar killed the Muslim Mohammad Afrazul with an axe and torched the body, then posted the torching and his justification online. ⁴⁴⁹ However, the Rajasthan police charge sheet states that Regar had had an illicit relation with a woman, whom he referred to as his "Hindu sister" in the video of him murdering Mohammed Afrazul, but she had a liking for a Bengali Muslim man, the chargesheet states. Regar was upset and angry about it and thus went on a murderous rampage. Regar had earlier revealed to the police that Afrazul was not his target, but that he wanted to kill another man named Ajju Sheikh, who allegedly was in touch with this woman who police believe, Regar had illicit relations with. ⁴⁵⁰
11	Jan 2018	Online / India	In January, a Facebook posting of a list of 100 interfaith couples surfaced where readers were encouraged to take violent action, claiming that the couples were results of 'love jihad'. The posting included profiles and personal contact information, subjecting couples and family members to social pressure and undermining their safety, including one couple who reported receiving death threats. ⁴⁵¹
12	Jan 2018	Karnataka	Right-wing organizations, including Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini, the women's wing of the VHP, organized an awareness program for parents of young women across many regions of coastal Karnataka on 'love jihad'. This included visiting households, schools, colleges and distributing handbills across Mangaluru city and other parts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Kasargod. ⁴⁵²
13	Jan 2018	Baghpat	A Muslim youth and his two brothers were beaten up by members of Hindu Yuva Vahini and Vishwa Hindu Parishad on at a Baghpat court for carrying out 'love jihad', as the youth was set to marry a Hindu woman from Punjab there. ⁴⁵³

Source: Miscellaneous sites/reports as cited, and Dr. Angana P. Chatterji.

446 Financial Express Online, "Rajasthan Government Wants Students, Teachers to Learn about Love Jihad; Here Is How", *The Financial Express*. November 19, 2017, <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/rajasthan-government-wants-students-teachers-to-learn-about-love-jihad-here-is-how/939167/>

447 Rachna Dhanrajani, "Former Model Accuses Husband Of 'Love Jihad'", *The Hindu*. November 18, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/former-model-accuses-husband-of-love-jihad/article20553502.ece>

448 Mishra, "Love Jihad Incidents in 2017".

449 Shruti Menon, "Behind Rajasthan Killing, Mistaken Identity, 'Love Jihad' Lie, Hate Clips." *NDTV*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/behind-rajasthan-killing-mistaken-identity-love-jihad-lie-hate-videos-1792369>.

450 Times Now Digital, "Rajasthan Hacking: Accused Made 'Love Jihad' Claim to Cover His Affair With 'Hindu Sister', Say Police", Jan 15, 2018, *Times Now News*, <http://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/rajsamand-hate-crime-accused-shambhu-lal-regar-killed-afrazul-khan-love-jihad-claims-to-hide-illicit-relationship-rajasthan/189165>.

451 Gowen, "India's Hindu right intensifies".

452 Sharan Poovana. "Right-Wing Outfits Campaign in Karnataka Against 'Love Jihad'". *Livemint*. January 04, 2018. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/T4DS9yZjZVOIDSH4xHTc1M/Rightwing-outfits-campaign-in-Karnataka-against-love-jihad.html>.

453 Ishita Bhatia, "Lawyers, Drivers, Students, Waiters, Kiosks in 'Love-jihad' Spy Network", *Times of India*, January 16, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/lawyers-drivers-students-waiters-kiosks-in-love-jihad-spy-network/article-show/62514200.cms>.

The case of Hadiya-Akhila (2017)

The key case of 'love jihad' in 2017 was the Case of Hadiya-Akhila which occupied news headlines and public debate in India during the months of her court proceedings. This controversial case, which falsified claims of 'love jihad', became India's top story where "everyone wanted to save a woman who showed no signs of wanting to be saved".⁴⁵⁴ Hadiya, a young Hindu woman who claimed to have converted to Islam in 2012 under her own free will, faced legal proceedings after her father in January 2016 filed a habeas corpus petition after she disappeared from the campus where she studied. He claimed that his daughter was forcefully converted to Islam and that she had expressed being held against her will by two of her Muslim classmates. However, after she was found, Hadiya claimed that she was following Islam since 2012 and left her home out of her own will. The court later dismissed Ashokan's petition in June 2016 after she produced records of her admission to Satyasarani hostel in Manjeri. By December 2016 after marrying a Muslim man, her father filed another petition and alleged that she had converted to Islam through 'love jihad' and feared that she would be taken to join ISIS in Afghanistan, citing two cases of Kerala women joining the group after conversion and marriage to Muslim men. Despite Hadiya presenting her marriage certificate and marriage registration certificate, the judgment from the Kerala High Court, in the last week of May 2017, sided with her father Ashokan. The judges were unimpressed by Hadiya, a "gullible" and "ordinary girl of moderate intellectual capacity," who had "apparently memorized" Arabic verses. Hadiya's five-month marriage to Jahan was annulled; Hadiya was put in the care of her parents.⁴⁵⁵ In August, the National Investigation Agency, the Indian government's top antiterrorism organization, began investigating Hadiya's conversion and marriage. One news channel, *Republic*, states that more than twenty-five thousand tweets had shared a link to an investigation it had conducted into 'love jihad'. After the judgment, Hadiya became a celebrity, with media's hunger being fueled by the difficulty of catching a glimpse of her. Her appearances on television were furtive and fleeting: unauthorized recordings, glimpses through a phalanx of policemen hurrying her along.⁴⁵⁶ While being held by her father, Hadiya expressed her desire to return to her husband stating: "I need the freedom to meet the person I love...I am asking for fundamental rights".⁴⁵⁷ She also spoke about how her parents had tried to convert her back to Hinduism. She wanted to complete her education and continue on with her life.⁴⁵⁸ After over a year of court proceedings, the Supreme Court on 8 March 2018 overturned the annulment of Hadiya's marriage by the Kerala High Court on the basis that she had married out of her own free will, not as a result of 'love jihad'.⁴⁵⁹ It did, however allow the NIA to continue investigation into the allegations of a terror angle.⁴⁶⁰ The case of Hadiya reflects the ways in which generalizations have been made about 'love jihad' without concrete proof about the actual abduction and conversion of Hindu women and the way in which stories and examples of 'love jihad' have repeatedly been falsified.⁴⁶¹

454 Bhatia, "Right-Wing Men Assault Youth".

455 Ibid.

456 Ibid.

457 Ibid.

458 Ibid.

459 BBC, "India Supreme Court restores 'love jihad' marriage".

460 India Today, "Hadiya's Marriage Restored, Supreme Court Says No Love Jihad", *India Today*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/hadiya-s-marriage-to-shefin-stays-supreme-court-overturns-kerala-high-court-order-1184561-2018-03-08>.

461 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad".

'Love jihad' and Islamophobia

'Love jihad' utilizes exclusionary principles for political and communal mobilization through the creation of a common "enemy other" in the name of 'protecting' Hindu women. Far-right Hindu nationalists have constructed 'love jihad' as an organized conspiracy, whereby Muslim men are aggressively converting vulnerable Hindu women to Islam through trickery and marriage. In actual practice, however, there is a lack of evidence supporting the legitimacy of 'love jihad'. Propaganda against 'love jihad' has thus been a mere lethal mobilization strategy against love, for political gains in elections.⁴⁶² This vicious crusade against interfaith marriage, and demonization of Muslim men has further intensified the marginalization of Muslims in India and exacerbated a hostile, anti-Muslim political and social climate. As reflected in the preceding sections of this report, the increased mobilization and political focus on 'love jihad' in the last decade must be understood within the longstanding and fruitful history of anxieties about Muslims out-growing Hindu populations, which can be traced to as early as 1909 when N. Mukherji wrote the book 'Hindus: A Dying Race', and more pronounced connection to 'love jihad' can be traced to similar "abduction" and conversion campaigns launched by Arya Samaj and other Hindu revivalist bodies in the 1920s, as well as tensions around the recovery of Muslim and Hindu women from opposing parties in the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan.⁴⁶³ First appearing in 2009 in political and public discourse, the term 'love jihad' has gained more momentum since 2014, to the advantage of far right-wing nationalists. As exemplified in the previous paragraphs of this section, 'love jihad' has built traction by exacerbating the ongoing fears of 'breeding Muslims' set to overtake Hindu population in India. This is complimented by a highly patriarchal nationhood of violence against women, that simultaneously constructs reproductive women's bodies a site of communal anxiety about the future of the Hindu race, in a demographic war against other minorities.⁴⁶⁴ This ultra-Hindu nationalism and emphasis on the dominance of a Hindu population is also inseparable to anti-conversion laws and the *ghar vāpasī* (returning home) program which restricts the ability for Hindus to convert to other religions, while simultaneously advancing and encouraging the conversion, often forced conversions of other religious groups, to Hinduism. As emphasized by Gupta, a "...common thread that links both 'love jihad' and *ghar vāpasī* is the obsession with the numerical strength of Hindus. The numbers game, and constructed fears around it, has been central to the modern politics of Hindutva".⁴⁶⁵ More deeply, Gupta brings attention to the inextricable link between 'love jihad', *ghar vāpasī* and rising Hindu Nationalism in India, ultimately reflecting the national "shift in electoral politics to the right".⁴⁶⁶ The hostile anxieties and opposition to Hindu conversion to Islam, particularly from women who are responsible for the reproduction of Hindu children, thus manifests via the 'love jihad' propaganda and initiatives detailed in this report. As Gupta highlights: "the twin strategies of anti-conversion/reconversion can also be seen as an attempt to harden religious identities and boundaries, while undermining syncretic cultural practices and religious pluralities in our everyday life. The anxieties of the Hindu Right and a section of Hindu men have coalesced around threatened religious collectivities as well as intimate matters of family and the individual".⁴⁶⁷ Most importantly, "campaigns such as 'love jihad' and *ghar vāpasī* signify a shift in electoral politics to the right, and the marginalization of non-communal forces, whereby discourses of religious "othering" and hatred have persisted and gained a new lease of life".⁴⁶⁸ Cases and events around 'love jihad' in 2017 in particular, reflect the impact of this electoral politics, evident

462 Ibid.

463 Gupta, "Hindu women, Muslim men".

464 Mohan, "Love Jihad and demographic fears."

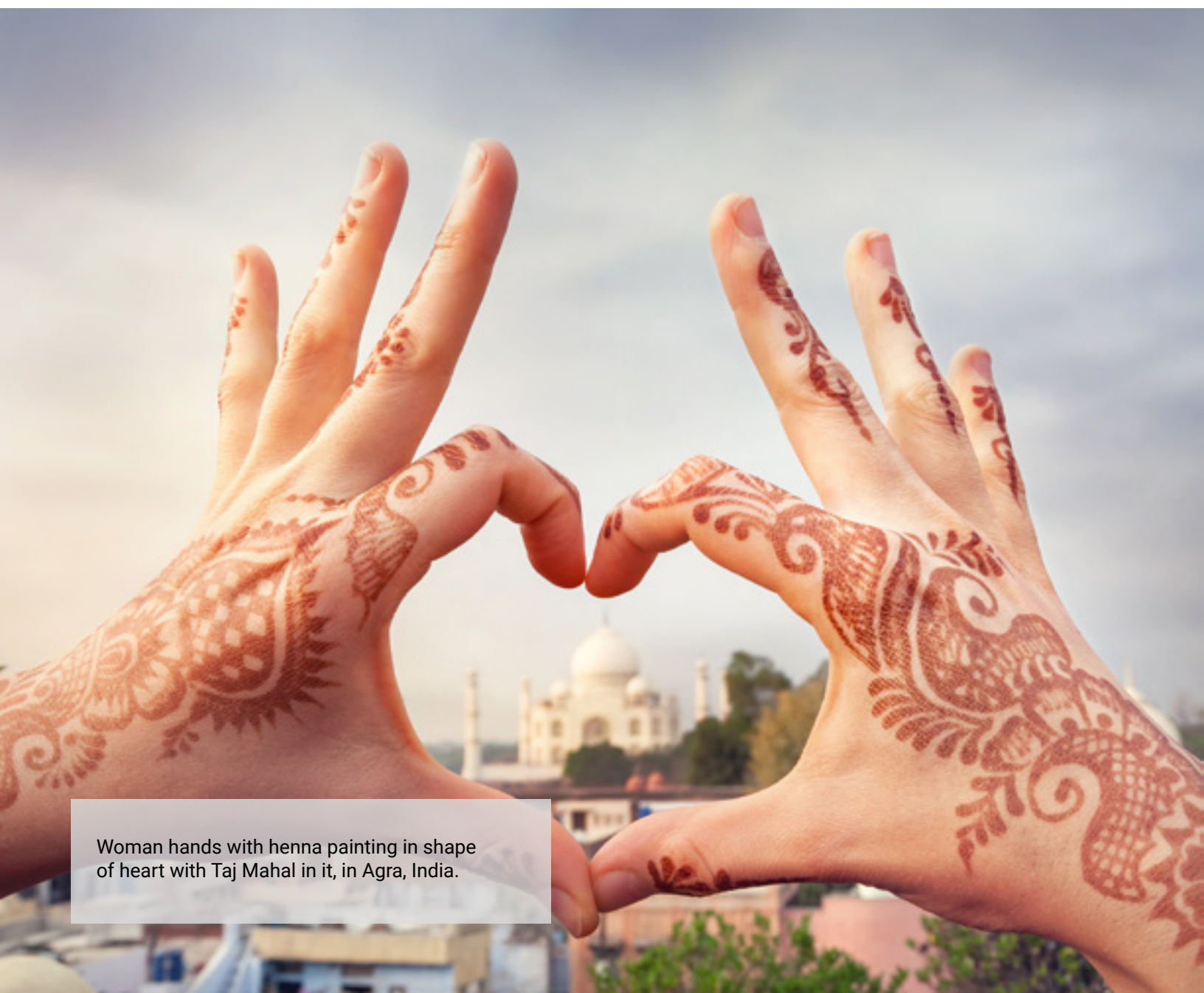
465 Gupta, "Allegories of love Jihad", 306.

466 Ibid, 310.

467 Ibid, 307.

468 Ibid, 310.

in the fortification of propaganda and public fears around the issues. Such rhetoric is materialized in educational awareness campaigns warning students against 'love jihad', political commitment to forming 'Romeo Squads' that fight against 'love jihad', and various attacks against interfaith couples and any individuals suspect of facilitating such unions. In particular, the controversial and widely broadcasted case of Hadiya, which captured nationwide interest, reinforces the false and mythical nature of the 'love jihad' campaign, and that the concerning degree to which Hindu women are stripped of their agency or free-will to choose who to love, and what religion to follow in their daily life. Notably, the impact of 'love jihad' campaigns and initiatives is most significant in heightening Islamophobia and intensifying anti-Muslim sentiment across the nation. Indeed, 'love jihad' is predicated on exclusionary principles, and reproduces historical references to the aggressive and libidinal energies of the Muslim male, thus creating a common "enemy other." 'Love jihad' has not only resulted in hostile communal tensions but also results in experiences of structural, as well as everyday discrimination among Muslims in their neighborhoods and daily life. The ultra-nationalist right-wing Hindutva war against supposed 'love jihad' has led to the displacement of some Muslim communities, built fear and insecurity and led to the intensified and increased securitization, policing and community vigilantism against Muslims in India.



Woman hands with henna painting in shape of heart with Taj Mahal in it, in Agra, India.